

City of Plantation Landscape Architecture presents ...

Plant of the Quarter



Chorisia speciosa/Floss Silk Tree

Ahhh, the love affair we plant lovers have with the strange and unusual plants we are so lucky to grow in South Florida. It does not get much stranger than the Floss Silk tree, botanically known as **Chorisia speciosa**. Chorisia, Greek for separate or distinct, minimizes just how wild it is. Speciosa, latin for handsome and showy nails it! Plant this tree for the most spectacular show of color in the Fall. Though it is native to Southern Brazil and Argentina but exotic to us, we will not hold its place of origin against this beauty. It feels at home in our soils, doesn't ask for much and doesn't invade our native spaces.

The Floss-Silk tree is in the Bombacaceae family. If nothing else this tells us big, heavy, sometimes spiny (always full of character) trunk with large flowers. Relatives are the Shaving Brush Tree and Red Silk Cotton Tree. True to its family, one of the Floss-Silk Tree's most outstanding qualities is truly its thorn covered trunk. The rose-like thorns are easily 1/2" long protruding from the entire trunk.

A brief summary of this species:

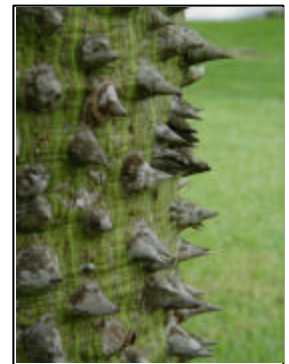
Habit/Height/Spread This medium, 40' to 50' high tree species is strong, bold and coarse in its habit. Their green branches are held distinctly horizontal from large thorned covered trunks with heavy bases. It is often as wide as it is high. Its lower branches tend to be wider than upper branches giving it a conical shape.

Foliage/Flowers/Fruit Floss-Silk trees lose (go deciduous) their large, coarse, palmately compound green leaves in the Fall. This makes their trunk and branching structure even more apparent. It is at this time that the tree sets its spectacular, 3" large, vivid, pink, five-petaled flowers. Its maximum season of color is October and November. Although the fruit is seldom seen in Florida, its seeds are covered with floss. This floss has been used for stuffing pillows. Thin strips of bark have been used to make rope.

Use and Management This strange and wonderful tree is a fast grower, requiring full sun and preferring a moist soil with good drainage. It will thrive on any reasonably fertile soil. Interesting, it is both drought tolerant and tolerates wet conditions. This tree borders on being too big for residential sites but if your yard has the space it would be a spectacular conversation piece. This tree deserves space around it and space away from it to be best appreciated. The City has successfully used this tree in our Parks, Annex building, Fire stations, and medians. In Palm Beach County you will find them along the R.O.W. on I95. Watch its branching structure. Maintain its dominant leader by pruning out any competing side branches.

Problems The Floss-silk tree is not bothered by pests and is disease free. Its large thorny trunk is a human hazard. Site this tree away from where small children play or do an underplanting of low shrub material to discourage activity near the trunk but not obscure viewing its trunk.

Recommendation Look for a tree with a dominant leader and plant slightly higher (about one inch) than the height in the pot. Always examine the trunk (of this and all species) and look for the flare. All trees have a flare at the base. If not, it has been planted too deep in the container. Remove soil until the flare is exposed and then plant. Create a tree ring and walled berm around the newly planted tree and water several times a week until it is established. Keep the area weed-free. Use little or no mulch. Keep any mulch 2 to 3 inches away from the trunk. Enjoy this spectacular tree.



Good Luck And Happy Botanizing!